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Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women

High-level plenary review in the year 2000

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. Introduction

A. Mandate

1. In its resolution 52/100 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly decided to convene, in the year 2000, a high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action five years after its adoption, and to consider further actions and initiatives. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General, with a view to ensuring participation at a high political level, to explore in a report to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session the possibility, among other options, of convening the review (a) at the start of the fifty-fifth session of the Assembly, (b) within the framework of the proposed millennium Assembly, if agreed upon by the Assembly, (c) following the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women or (d) as a special session of the Assembly.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly decided that the Commission on the Status of Women should serve as the preparatory committee for the high-level review, and as such would be open to the participation of all States Members of the United Nations and members of specialized agencies and of observers, in accordance with the established practice of the Assembly. It invited the Commission to take appropriate action towards that end, including giving attention to appropriate arrangements for the involvement and participation of non-governmental organizations in the review.

3. The General Assembly also requested the Commission on the Status of Women to consider, at its forty-second session, the report of the Secretary-General requested in the resolution, thus enabling the Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, to decide on the issue at its fifty-second session or as soon as possible. The present report is submitted in accordance with the mandate contained in resolution 52/100.

B. Regional and other reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of regional plans and platforms for action

4. In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women, five regional preparatory conferences were convened under the auspices of the regional commissions.[1] They served as input to the work of the Commission on the Status of Women, acting as the preparatory committee for the Fourth World Conference on Women, at its thirty-ninth session. The regional review and appraisal processes planned for 1999 and 2000 are described below.

5. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) will organize, in 1999, an African regional conference to review implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The ECA African Centre for Women has so far held two subregional meetings on the implementation of the regional and global platforms for action, and will convene three more subregional meetings in 1998. An international conference on "African Women and Economic Development: Investing in Our Future" will also take place from 28 April to 1 May 1998 in Addis Ababa.

6. At this point, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has taken no formal decision on the conduct of a review process to assess regional implementation that could serve as input into the global review process. Inter-agency activities and efforts at the regional level to stimulate regional cooperation among United Nations and other entities for the implementation of the Platform for Action will continue and will include a review of the progress achieved in those activities. In this regard, consideration might be given to encouraging ECE to engage in a regional review and assessment process of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Regional Platform for Action – Women in a Changing World – Call for Action from an ECE Perspective.

7. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will continue to implement the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2001. Several meetings of the presiding officers of the Regional Conference on the Integration of Women into the Economic and Social Development of Latin America and the Caribbean will be held between now and the year 2000. The Eighth Regional Conference is planned for the year 2000 to review implementation of the Regional Programme of Action and to identify priority issues for the period 2001-2006.

8. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) plans to hold a high-level meeting in 1999 to review implementation of the Jakarta Declaration and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific and regional implementation of the Platform for Action, subject to the approval of ESCAP at its fifty-fourth session, in April 1998. An ad hoc expert group meeting is scheduled to be held in the last quarter of 1998 to prepare this regional review.

9. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) plans to convene a regional meeting in 1999 to follow up implementation of the recommendations of the Fourth World Conference on Women. Also in 1999 it plans to convene an Arab conference to follow up all global conferences.

10. In connection with the Fourth World Conference on Women, the United Nations, in collaboration with civil society, instituted an exchange of ideas and information through electronic networking. Since then, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) have launched WomenWatch, an Internet gateway on global women's issues. Plans are under way and resources are being sought to conduct, under the WomenWatch initiative, open-ended on-line conferencing on the implementation of the Platform for Action as one avenue for involving civil society in the exchange of ideas for the review and appraisal process.

II. General considerations regarding a high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the Beijing Platform for Action

11. Before exploring options for convening the review, the question of the duration and the format of the review need to be examined. Requirements for the substantive preparations of the review, which have a bearing on its timing, are also considered below.

A. Duration of the review

12. The General Assembly has made it clear that it wishes both to highlight the most significant trends in terms of accomplishments and shortcomings in the past and to identify challenges in the future. In its resolution 52/100, the Assembly specifies that the review should also consider further actions and initiatives. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the meeting time required to implement such an agenda. While much of the preparatory work would be expected to be undertaken in 1999 and 2000 by the Commission on the Status of Women serving as the preparatory committee for the review, all interested Governments, as well as observers, should be provided with an opportunity to participate in the event itself, and sufficient time should be allocated to this end.

13. Based on experience and the examples of similar events already scheduled, it is suggested that the duration of the review should be five working days. A shorter event would impose limitations on the number of speakers that could be accommodated and would provide little time for finalization and adoption of a final statement. It is thus recommended that at least four, and preferably five, days be allocated for the review. In determining the duration of the review it may also be decided that time-limits for statements in the plenary would be necessary, as has been the practice for similar events.

B. Format of the review

14. There are essentially two formats for convening a high-level plenary event of the General Assembly: (a) as part of a regular session or (b) as a special session. Format (a) could be implemented either during the main part of a regular session (September to December) or during a resumed regular session (January to September). Format (b), a special session of the Assembly, would be a discrete event of the Assembly. Participation in either format would be governed by established practice and by relevant resolutions, including resolution 52/100.

C. Preparations for the review

15. As the Commission on the Status of Women will serve as the preparatory committee for the review, consideration should be given to the length of its session in the year 2000. A thorough preparatory process covering both the review and appraisal, and further actions and initiatives, should be envisaged as essential.

16. The Commission's regular work programme for 1999 and 2000 already includes an item on the comprehensive quinquennial review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/6 of 22 July 1996). In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 52/100, time will also be needed to prepare for the review's consideration of further actions and initiatives. To complete preparations in the year 2000, an extension of the Commission's forty-fourth session by five working days should be considered. Alternatively, an additional session of one week should be convened between

the conclusion of the Commission's forty-fourth session and the convening of the review.

III. Options for convening the review as contained in General Assembly resolution 52/100

17. The options contained in resolution 52/100 for convening the review are considered below, on the assumption that the event would not exceed five working days.

A. At the start of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly

18. In considering this option, Member States may wish to consider that, in its resolution 51/241 of 31 July 1997, the General Assembly decided that the plenary meetings of the General Assembly should be formally opened every year on the first Tuesday following 1 September, with the election of the President, Vice-Presidents and Chairmen of the Main Committees (the General Committee). Accordingly, in the year 2000, the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly will open on Tuesday, 5 September.

19. In its resolution 51/241, the General Assembly also decided that the General Committee should meet as soon as possible after its election and should present its report to the General Assembly before the commencement of the general debate, and that the plenary meetings of the General Assembly should reconvene in mid-September to consider the report of the General Committee. The Assembly also decided that all Main Committees should hold brief organizational sessions once the Assembly has taken decisions on the agenda, before the commencement of the general debate. The Assembly further decided that there should continue to be only one general debate each year, beginning in the third week of September.

20. If, as a result of the implementation of resolution 51/241, the general debate of the fifty-fifth session is to begin on Monday, 18 September 2000, the period between the opening of the fifty-fifth session and the beginning of the general debate (i.e. from Wednesday, 6 September, to Friday, 15 September 2000) totals eight working days. During that period, the General Committee has to meet to make its recommendations to the General Assembly on its organization of work, agenda and allocation of items; the Assembly has to meet to consider the recommendations of the General Committee; and each of the six Main Committees has to hold an organizational session. Those mandated meetings would take up a minimum of four to five working days. A five-day meeting for the review during the period between 6 to 15 September, whether as part of the fifty-fifth session or as a special session, would therefore overlap with the ongoing mandated work of the Assembly and its Main Committees.

B. Within the framework of the proposed millennium Assembly, if agreed upon by the General Assembly

21. The General Assembly has not yet taken a final decision on the proposal that it be convened, in the year 2000, as a special millennium Assembly, as set out in paragraph 91 of the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950). This option cannot therefore be elaborated at this stage, pending further action by the Assembly on the proposal pursuant to paragraph 26 of its resolution 52/12 B.

C. Following the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women

22. The Commission on the Status of Women traditionally meets in the first half of March. Pending decisions from intergovernmental bodies, including the Committee on Conferences and the General Assembly, it can be anticipated that in the year 2000, the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will possibly be held from 6 to 17 March.

23. In the event that the review is to be convened following the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women in 2000, this could be carried out either: (a) as part of the regular fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, or (b) as a special session. Under this option, the question of the required amount of time for completing the preparatory work, either during an extended session of the Commission on the Status of Women or in conjunction with an additional session, would need to be resolved (see paras. 15 and 16 above).

24. The practicability of convening the review immediately after the session of the Commission on the Status Women should be assessed in the light of the time needed to complete thorough preparations. The review would need to be scheduled so as to allow enough time between the closing of the Commission session and the

opening of the review for the timely circulation of the Commission's report in all official languages. Such a space would also provide opportunities for further informal discussions among Member States on any issues that may be pending after the session of the Commission.

25. In recent years, Member States have made efforts to avoid overlap between the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights in setting the dates for their sessions. A review immediately following the session of the Commission on the Status of Women would be likely to overlap with the 2000 session of the Commission on Human Rights.

26. In the event that it is decided to convene the review sometime after the conclusion of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, but not immediately following that session, the review could be held either as part of the regular fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly or as a special session. Proposed dates in either case are from 22 to 26 May or from 5 to 9 June 2000.

D. As a special session of the General Assembly

27. In considering this option, Member States will recall that a number of special sessions of the General Assembly have been or are being convened in order to follow up global conferences, or to focus on other events. They include:

(a) A special session of the General Assembly devoted to the fight against the illicit production, sale, demand, traffic and distribution of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and related activities, from 8-10 June 1998 (resolutions 51/64 of 12 December 1996 and 52/92 of 12 December 1997). The Commission on Narcotic Drugs serves as the preparatory committee;

(b) A special session to review and appraise the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, from 30 June to 2 July 1999 (resolution 52/188 of 18 December 1997). The Commission for Population and Development serves as the preparatory committee;

(c) A special session in 2000 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and to consider further actions and initiatives (resolutions 50/161 of 22 December 1995, 51/202 of 17 December 1996 and 52/25 of 26 November 1997). The Commission for Social Development is designated to undertake work in 1999/2000 for the preparation of the special session. A preparatory committee of the whole of the General Assembly is also to be established. It will hold an organizational session in 1998 and will initiate substantive activities in 1999. The preparatory committee will hold an organizational session in May 1998, at which further decisions concerning the preparatory process and the special session are likely to be taken. It is anticipated that preparatory meetings will be convened in 1999 and in 2000, prior to the special session.

28. It should also be noted for information, that the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons is expected to be held in New York from 24 April to 19 May 2000, and the twenty-third session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women will take place in June/July 2000.

29. In the event that the review is conducted in the year 2000 as a special session, its timing should be looked at in relation to other, already scheduled events. Factors that would facilitate or impede optimal servicing, should also be considered.

30. In this connection, and as noted above, a back-to-back scheduling of the review with the Commission on the Status of Women in 2000 would present constraints in terms of availability of documentation and overlapping with the session of the Commission on Human Rights. Moreover, as indicated in paragraph 20, a special session during the period from 6 to 15 September would overlap with the ongoing mandated work of the General Assembly and its Main Committees. On the other hand, scheduling the review sometime after the conclusion of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and before the beginning of the fifty-fifth session of the Assembly would permit maximum servicing and conference room facilities to be devoted to the event.

31. If it is decided to convene the review as a special session sometime after the conclusion of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and before the beginning of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, Member States may wish to consider either 22 to 26 May, or 5 to 9 June 2000 for the convening of the review.

E. Participation

32. The General Assembly emphasized in its resolution 52/100 that participation at a high political level should be ensured in considering the various options for convening the

review. Resolutions for special sessions usually identify the anticipated level of participation. For example, the special session on the International Conference on Population and Development is expected to be convened at the highest possible level of participation (resolution 52/188). The Assembly may therefore wish to call for participation in the review at the highest possible level.

33. Resolution 52/100 establishes that the Commission on the Status of Women, for purposes of the review, will be open to the participation of all States members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies and of observers, in accordance with established practice. The General Assembly may wish to decide on the same scope for participation in the review itself.

34. In its resolution 52/100, the General Assembly also invited the Commission to give attention to appropriate arrangements for the involvement and participation of non-governmental organizations in the review. Based on recommendations by the Commission at its forty-second session, the Assembly may wish to consider the question of the participation in the review process of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and of other non-governmental organizations engaged in the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women.

IV. Other issues

35. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/100, designated the Commission on the Status of Women as the preparatory committee for the review. In order to carry out this task, an item on preparations for the review should be included in the agenda of the Commission, as distinct from the regular work programme of the Commission. Arrangements have been made for the Commission to convene as the preparatory committee, with the participation of all States, when considering the present report at its forty-second session. Future arrangements might include the scheduling of specific meetings of the Commission to be set aside for its work when it is meeting as an "all-States" preparatory committee.

36. While the conduct of the comprehensive review is already foreseen in the Commission's agenda, including necessary documentation for 1999 and 2000, the Secretary-General could be requested to submit to the Commission in 1999 initial suggestions regarding further initiatives and actions that might be considered during the review. Such initial suggestions could draw from the work undertaken by the Commission and in other parts of the United Nations system since the Fourth World Conference on Women, including national action plans, regional activities and a review of data and information available from the United Nations system. The report of the Secretary-General on emerging issues in the year 2000 would provide additional material for the preparation of the outlook beyond 2000.

V. Conclusion

37. Based on the options contained in General Assembly resolution 52/100, and taking into account that one option – within the framework of the proposed millennium Assembly – remains subject to a decision of the Assembly, recommended choices for holding the high-level plenary review to appraise and assess the progress achieved in the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women and the Beijing Platform for Action five years after its adoption, and to consider further actions and initiatives, are summarized below:

(a) A high-level plenary review at the start of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, that is, between 6 and 15 September 2000: (i) as part of the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, or (ii) as a special session;

(b) A high-level plenary review as part of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, after the conclusion of the forty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women and before the fifty-fifth session of the Assembly in the year 2000. Proposed dates are 22 to 26 May or 5 to 9 June;

(c) A special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000, to be held either from 22 to 26 May or from 5 to 9 June.

38. In all instances, the establishment of an ad hoc committee of the whole of the review should be envisaged, as well as the possibility of establishing working groups as needed.

Notes

[1] At those conferences, the following instruments were adopted: the Jakarta Declaration and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Asia and the Pacific, African Platform for Action, the Regional Programme of Action for the Women of Latin America and the Caribbean, 1995-2000, the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005 and the Regional Platform for Action – Women in a Changing World – Call for Action from an ECE Perspective (see E/CN.6/1995/5 and Add.1-5).